

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 IO-12 ADP-00 COA-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-02

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1433

INFO AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

CINCLANT

C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 06094

E. O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PBOR, IC, UK

SUBJECT: BRITISH VIEW OF FISHERIES DISPUTE

1. IN WAKE OF DISCUSSION ON ANOTHER MATTER, FCO OFFICIAL MENTIONED TO US TODAY THAT FCO HAD INSTRUCTED BRITISH EMBASSY WASHINGTON TO REITERATE TO STATE DEPARTMENT HMG' S EARNEST DESIRE FOR A PEACEFUL, NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT OF THE FISHERIES DISPUTE WITH ICELAND. HE APPRECIATED USG' S DESIRE TO STAY OUT OF THIS DISPUTE, BUT EXPRESSED HOPE THAT IF APPROPRIATE OPPORTUNITY AROSE DURING PRESIDENT NIXON' S FORTHCOMING TRIP TO ICELAND, PRESIDENT MIGHT COMMEND TO ICELANDERS THE DESIRABILITY OF RESUMING NEGOTIATIONS.

2. HE OBSERVED THAT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CATCH LIMITA-
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TION PROPOSED BY ICELANDERS AND LIMITATION ACCEPTABLE TO UK WAS REALLY NOT ALL THAT GREAT AND OUGHT TO BE SUSCEPTIBLE TO COMPROMISE. UK HAS ALREADY LOWERED ITS DEMAND ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS AND IS STILL WAITING FOR A COUNTER- OFFER. HE ALSO NOTED THAT UK HAD A RIGHT TO USE NATO BASE AT KEFLAVIK, BUT THAT IN THE INTERESTS OF KEEPING DISPUTE WITHIN BOUNDS, IT WOULD NOT MAKE AN ISSUE OF THE MATTER RIGHT NOW.

3. FCO' S CONCILIATORY TONE IS TYPICAL OF HMG APPROACH TO THIS QUESTION FROM THE BEGINNING. IN A STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS MAY 21, FOREIGN SECRETARY DOUGLAS- HOME STRESSED THAT ROYAL NAVY FRIGATES HAD FINALLY BEEN SENT INTO THE DISPUTED 50- MILE ZONE ONLY AFTER IT BECAME CLEAR THAT ICELAND WAS MAKING A DETERMINED EFFORT TO DRIVE BRITISH VESSELS FROM THE AREA BY FORCE. HE PLEDGED THAT THE FRIGATES WOULD TAKE DEFENSIVE ACTION ONLY AND WOULD BE WITHDRAWN AS SOON AS ICELAND CEASED TO HARASS BRITISH TRAWLERS.

4. THE GOVERNMENT' S STAND WAS WARMLY ENDORSED AND OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORTED BY THE OPPOSITION. AS ONE LABOR MP PUT IT, " THERE ARE OCCASIONS WHEN, GREATLY DARING, IT IS NECESSARY TO RAISE A SMALL AND DIFFIDENT VOICE IN FAVOR OF THE RIGHTS OF THE STRONG AGAINST THE WEAK."

5. COMMENT: HMG' S DECISION TO SEND IN THE ROYAL NAVY WAS TAKEN MOST RELUCTANTLY AND ONLY AFTER DOMESTIC PRESSURE, GENERATED BY THE TRAWLERMEN' S REFUSAL TO FISH WITHOUT PROTECTION, BECAME IMPERATIVE. THE BRITISH ARE UNDER NO ILLUSION ABOUT THE ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES THEIR ACTION IS LIKELY TO HAVE ON PUBLIC OPINION ABROAD. A CABINET MEMBER RUEFULLY ADMITTED TO US SOME TIME BACK THAT IF BRITAIN WERE EVER FORCED TO SEND IN THE NAVY, IT WOULD GREATLY LESSEN THE CHANCES FOR A SATISFACTORY OUTCOME TO THE DISPUTE.

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